

That Chile Emmett in That Casket

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Jet Magazine, Sept. 15, 1955

Sometimes the page was tacked, flush against plaster with a pearl hatpin, or jammed into a splintered frame with Jesus, smirking. In some kingly

front room, its place was in the shadowbox, propped on one ripped edge, or laid curly-cornered on the coffee table, smudged and eaten sheer

with the pass-around. In the kitchen, it was blurred with stew smoke or pot liquor-blotched, until somebody got smart enough to scotch-tape

it to the door of the humming fridge, and the boy without eyes kept staring. Mamas did the slow fold before wedging it into their flowered plastic

coin purses, daddies found a sacred place in pleather wallets right next to the thought of cash. And at least one time a week, usually on Sunday

after church or when you dared think you didn't have to speak proper to that old white lady who answered the phone at your daddy's job,

or when, as mama said, you *showed your ass* by sassin' or backtalking, the page would be pulled down, pulled out, unfolded, smoothed flat,

and you had to look. *Look, boy*. And they made sure you kept looking while your daddy shook his head, mumbling *This why you got to act*

right 'round white folk, then dropped a smoke-threaded gaze to whisper *Lord, they kilt that chile more than one time*. Mama held onto your eyes—

See what happen when you don't be careful? She meant a white man could turn you into a stupid reason for a suit, that your last face would be silt, stunned in its skid and worshipped, your right eye reborn in the cave of your mouth. *Look!* she screeched. You did. But then you remembered there weren't any pictures of *you* in the house, pinned high on the wall, folded up tight up against the Lord, totted like talisman in wallet or purse.

You'd searched, woe climbing like river in your chest. But there were no pictures of you anywhere. You sparked no moral. You were alive.

